

THE SECRET OF LOVE TO GOD

NO. 2730

A SERMON

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“We love him, because he first loved us.”

1 John 4:19

THIS morning [Sermon #1553, Faith Working by Love], those of us who were here meditated upon the connection between faith and love, so I thought we had better pursue the same subject somewhat further, hoping that we might still receive divine instruction upon that important theme.

You must have noticed how continually John blends faith with knowledge and love, as in the sixteenth verse of this chapter—“We have known and believed the love that God hath to us.” All through this epistle, he constantly repeats the words “we know,” “we know,” “we know,” “we know.” And perhaps even more frequently he uses the word “love.”

Knowledge, faith, and love are plaited together so closely that they cannot be separated. They are intertwined and united like the warp and the woof of a fabric, and so they become really one. To know Christ, to trust Christ, to love Christ—these are among the elementary principles of piety. Without all of these graces, there is no true religion. But if these things are in us, and abound, they make us to be neither barren nor unfruitful.

When you notice that knowledge, faith, and love are placed like a set of precious jewels in one case, it leads you to see how necessary it is that all the powers of our nature should be renewed. Our intellects need to be regenerated so that we may be able to know Christ, for those who are unspiritual do not know Him. They hear about Him, but they are strangers to Him.

Spiritual things are only known to spiritual men. Faith is an act partly of the intellect and partly of the affections, and we must therefore have both head and heart renewed by the Spirit of God, or we shall not have true faith. Even though the mind may be purified, it will not suffice unless the affections are also cleansed, because love to God never comes out of a foul heart—it is a plant that will not grow on the dunghill of our corrupt nature. We must be transformed by the renewing of our minds, or else we can never know God, nor trust God, nor love God. In fact, it comes to this, as Christ told Nicodemus, “You must be born again.”

There must be a thorough, real, radical change—not of this faculty or that, but of the whole man. He that sits upon the throne says, “Behold, I make all things new.” And all who come into His kingdom are made new creatures in Christ Jesus just as much as if they had been annihilated and had been created over again.

What a solemn influence this truth should exercise over us! In what a clear light is true religion thus set before us! It is no mere child's play, no matter to be settled offhand, without thought or consideration. Search yourselves and see whether the Spirit of God has wrought in you the true knowledge, the true faith, and the true love—for, otherwise, whatever you may think you possess of any of these things is not of God.

This short text is one from which I have often preached to you. I notice that there are already three sermons [Sermons #229, Love; #1008, Love's Logic; #1299, Love's Birth and Parentage] upon it published in my volumes—and I hope to preach from it a good many more times if I am spared, for it is one of those inexhaustible wells into which you may let down the bucket every morning—and always pull it up full.

It is a mine with a good many seams of the richest ore. You may think that you have dug all its treasures out, but you have only to sink a new shaft to find that there is another seam just as rich as the former one. And when you have brought all that wealth to the surface—and that may take your whole lifetime—someone else may sink another shaft and open up a fresh vein.

I. I shall try to explain the text, first, by showing you that OUR LOVE TO GOD IS A FACT WHICH DESERVES AN AVOWAL.

Is it a fact with you, dear friend, or is it not? Let every one of us answer this question for himself or herself. With some of us, blessed be God, it is a fact that we do love God—and it is a fact that is worth speaking out and worth writing down. The Holy Spirit Himself thought it worthwhile to move John to write down for himself and for his brethren, “We love him.”

Some feel that they must honestly confess that they do not love the Lord, and there may be others who are quite indifferent as to whether they love Him or not. But there are some who must avow their affection for Him. The very stones in the street would cry out against them if they did not confess their love to their Lord. They feel compelled to say, in the face of all the world, “We love him.”

They do not say it boastingly, for they give the reason why they love Him—“because he first loved us”—a reason drawn from the grace of God which prevents anything like boasting concerning it. Yet, trustfully, boldly, unhesitatingly, they do say outright, so that whoever will may hear it, “‘We love him.’” Others may not, but we do, and we gather together as a company of people who are agreed upon this point, ‘We love him.’ We love God, especially as He is revealed to us in the person of Jesus Christ, His only-begotten and well-beloved Son, who loved us and gave Himself for us.”

If you ask me, “Why ought this fact to be avowed?” I answer, first, *because there can be no good reason for concealing it*. I cannot imagine a true man saying, “I love Christ, but I do not want others to know that I love him, lest they should laugh at me.” That is a reason to be laughed at, or rather, to be wept over.

Afraid of being laughed at? O sir, this is indeed a cowardly fear! Are there not some of Christ’s servants who live in the full glare of public observation and whose names are ridiculed every hour of the day? Yet has that ridicule ever broken their bones or their hearts? Verily, nay. And if God makes men of us, we ought never to be afraid of such a thing as a sneer, or a jeer, or a jest on account of our religion.

Perhaps some will say that they do love Christ, but that if they avowed their affection for Him, they would provoke opposition. Of course you would. Did not God Himself say so to the serpent in the Garden of Eden, “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed”? Did you expect the woman’s seed to be loving the Lord, and yet not to be opposed by the serpent’s seed?

Did not Jesus say to His disciples, “If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you”? You know how the world treated Him—and shall the disciple be above his Master, the servant above his Lord?

So, my brethren, if you love the Lord, say, “We love him,” for there is no good reason why you should not avow your affection for Him. But on the other hand, there is abundant reason why you should do so, for, first, *Jesus Christ deserves and claims that avowal*. He was not ashamed of His love for us. He left all the glories of heaven that He might espouse our cause.

And when we came to His feet, burdened, and guilty, and full of woes, there was not one lovely trait in our character to attract Him toward us—yet He took pity upon us, and loved us, and saved us—and now He pleads for us in heaven. He is not ashamed to call us brethren, so, surely, we ought—bravely and joyfully—to declare that we are on His side.

We ought not to need any urging to that avowal. But if we do, let us remember that Christ claims it, for He has said, “Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

And He also said, “Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God: but he that denieth me”—and the apposition, you see, makes that word “deny” mean, “he that does not confess me”—“he that denieth me before men shall be denied before the angels of God.” Come, then, brothers and sisters, since Christ claims it, and so richly deserves it, let the avowal of this fact be made, if fact it is—“We love him.”

It ought to be made, also, *because it puts us among most blessed company*. I wish I had the tongue of the eloquent, so that I could depict for you that great cloud of witnesses up on high who, with one voice, exclaim, “We love him.” If I ask all who are in heaven, “Who among you loves Jesus Christ?” I seem at once to hear a response, like Niagara in volume, but far sweeter in sound, “We love him.” And above all human and angelic voices comes the declaration of the eternal Father, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

Look through all the pages of history and put to the noblest men and women, who seem still to live, this question, “Who loves Christ?” and at once, up from dark dungeons and cruel racks there rises the confessors’ cry, “We love him.” And from the fiery stake, where they clapped their hands as they were being burned to death, the same answer comes, “We love him.” If you could walk through the miles of catacombs at Rome and if the holy dead, whose dust lies there, could suddenly wake up, they would all shout, “We love him.”

The best and bravest of men, the noblest and purest of women, have all been in this glorious company. So, surely, you are not ashamed to come forward and say, “Put my name down among them. Though meanest of them all, I wish that ‘we’ might comprehend—me, and my children, and my friends—that we all might be able truthfully to say, ‘We love him.’” Happy are they who enlist in such an army as this, which has emblazoned on its banners this grand declaration, “We love him.”

Further, dear friends, if you love the Lord, confess that fact, *because your avowal may influence others*. It may be that some who do not yet love him, will be constrained to do so when they hear you say, “We love him.” Many a child has learnt to love Christ through his parents’ godly example. And many a stranger to true religion has been induced to yield his heart to Jesus by seeing the loving behavior of those who were Christ’s disciples.

So, for this poor world’s sake, confess your love to your Lord. Perhaps you will never be a preacher and you need not wish to be one unless you are divinely called to the office, but you can at least be a confessor of Christ, and by that avowal, and by living consistently with it, you will draw your one or two to the Savior, in whose sight every soul is precious beyond all value.

Besides, *it may be a great blessing to yourself* to avow your love to Christ. I always look back, with deep gratitude, to the day in which I was baptized. You know that we baptize none but those who profess to have believed in our Lord Jesus Christ, so it is absolutely certain that we attribute no saving efficacy to baptism in water, yet, at the same time, we have proved, again and again, that there is a distinct blessing in the observance of the ordinance.

It was so in my case. Up to that time, I was timorous and trembling—and afraid to confess Christ. But after I went into the river and was publicly baptized into His death, I lost all fear of man and I think I can honestly say that I have never been ashamed to own my Lord from that day to this. That coming out boldly for Christ was like crossing the Rubicon or burning the boats—no retreat was possible after that—nor have I ever wanted to go back to the world from which I then came out.

The world has had many an ill word for me from that day to this and there is no love lost between us. I have done with the world as the world has done with me—I am crucified unto the world, and the world unto me. And you Christian people will find it good when you can also say, “We have come right out from the world and we love Christ.”

Perhaps somebody says, “I should not be admitted into society if I were to confess Christ.” Society? Humph!

*“In such society as this
My weary soul would rest:*

*The man that dwells where Jesus is,
Must be forever bless'd."*

Be out-and-out for Him. Unfurl your colors, never hide them, but nail them to the mast and say to all who ridicule the saints, "If you have any ill words for the followers of Christ, pour them out upon me. If you call us canting hypocrites, Presbyterians, Methodists—say what you like about us—I am quite prepared to bear my share of your slander, I will even glory in it, if so it must be. But know this—you shall hear it whether you like it or not—'I love Christ,' and amongst the people whose names are written down as lovers of the Lord, my name shall stand, unworthy though I am of such an honor."

This is a fact which deserves avowal and I would rejoice if I could induce some of you who have never made that avowal, to join yourselves openly with the people of God in our Lord's appointed way.

II. Now we will take the text in another way and note, secondly, that OUR LOVE IS AN EFFECT FLOWING FROM A CAUSE—"We love him, *because* he first loved us."

And first, *it is not the result of effort*. We do not love God because we tried to do so. True love cannot come in that way. You may say, "I intend to think," and you may succeed in doing it, but you cannot act like that with regard to love. Oh, no! Love is not a slave to be at any man's beck and call—it is a master—and when even the lowest form of love comes upon a man, it carries him right away wherever it will.

So, this highest type of human love—our love to God—overmasters us. It is never the result of effort on our part. Did you ever hear a mother say, "I will try to love my child"? I do not know how she would go to work to bring about such a state of things as that. Oh, no! She loves her child naturally—she cannot help loving her own offspring. I never tried to love my sons. I cannot help loving them. My love to them is not the effect of any effort on my part. It is as free as the dew that drops from heaven—we may not know how it comes, but we know that we have not made it.

Nor is love to God produced in any heart *as a matter of duty*. We love God, not because we felt that we ought to love him, but "because he first loved us." A sense of duty is a very proper thing concerning many matters, and I do not deny that it is our duty to love God with all our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength, for this is the very essence of the law of the Lord. But no man ever does loves as a mere matter of duty.

You love even an earthly object because you cannot help yourself—and you love God because He is infinitely lovely, and because He has so completely won your heart as to engross your whole affection. Because he first loved us, and that love of His has been shed abroad in our hearts, we have loved Him in return as a matter of course—we cannot help doing so. The mighty deeps of His immeasurable love, high up on the eternal hills, flow down into the inmost recesses of our empty hearts. And when, afterwards, a fountain of love is seen springing up out of them, the secret of its action is to be traced to that great reservoir away up on the everlasting hills.

So our love to God is not the result of effort, nor does it arise from a sense of duty—*it comes by knowledge and faith*. As John says, "We have known and believed the love that God hath to us." We have been informed, by a revelation in this Book, which we accept as infallible, that, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." We have believed in Him. That is, we have trusted Him. We know, therefore, that we shall not perish, but that we have everlasting life. And now we love God for having bestowed upon us the priceless gift of His dear Son to redeem us from death and destruction.

Further, *the cause of our love to God abundantly justifies it*. People say that "love is blind," but in this case, the eyes of love are wide open and farseeing. Love can look the Savior in the face and point to His beauties, which fully justify all its admiration of Him and devotion to Him. We read the story of Christ—of His unique life in human flesh and His sacrificial death for our sins, and we say that if we did not love him, we should be of all men the most ungrateful.

As He has laid down His life for us and as He still lives to carry on the work of our salvation—as He has loved us from before the foundation of the world and will love us when this world has passed away—we must love Him. It is wasting words to argue over this matter. There is, in the natural and proper order of things, an absolute necessity that such a love as Christ's is should have the supreme affection of our hearts in return.

We feel, also, that *such a cause is capable of producing a far larger result than we have ever experienced yet*. "Because he first loved us," we expect to love Him much more than we do at present. And we believe that, if we loved Him so much that men called us fanatics, we would be perfectly justified, and that if our heart were all taken up with Him—if we lived for nothing else but to serve Him—if we had not a breath or a pulse that was not devoted to Him—if we laid down our lives for Him, yea, if we had ten thousand lives and laid them all down for Him—we think that such love as that which He spontaneously showed to us when we were His enemies would perfectly justify us for doing all that, and ten thousand times more if it were possible.

See you, then, dear brethren and sisters, that our love to our Lord Jesus Christ is an effect produced by a great cause, namely, His eternal love to us. Oh, if you do really believe that He has loved you so, sit down and turn the subject over in your mind, and say to yourself, "Jesus loves me. Jesus chose me. Jesus redeemed me. Jesus called me. Jesus has pardoned me. Jesus has taken me into union with Himself. Jesus has made me to be a part of the bride, the Lamb's wife. I shall be one with Him forever. He will put a crown upon my head and I shall sit with Him upon His throne. And this may happen within a week—perhaps I shall spend next Sabbath seeing Him face to face."

With such a hope as this, you must love him, must you not? Can your hearts resist His charms?

*"Hard is the heart that does not feel
Some sweet affection move,"*

whenever the love of Christ is proclaimed.

Yet we must not try to make ourselves love our Lord, but look to Christ's love first, for His love to us will beget in us love to Him. I know that some of you are greatly distressed because you cannot love Christ as much as you would like to do—and you keep on fretting because it is so. Now, just forget your own love to Him and think of His great love to you. And then, immediately, your love will come to something more like that which you would desire it to be.

III. But now, thirdly—and I must speak but briefly upon each point—OUR LOVE IS A SIMPLICITY FOUNDED UPON A MYSTERY.

"We love him." That is simple enough. "Because he first loved us." Ah! there is a great mystery which none of us can fully understand.

I say that our love to Christ is a simplicity and I want you to keep it so, because *some people treat it metaphysically*. Now, what is love? Will somebody give us a clear definition of it? Yes. Now, will somebody else give us another? By the time that we have two or three hundred definitions of love and put them all together, it is very probable that we shall have lost all idea of what love really is.

It is delight, it is joy, it is longing for association, it is—well, you know what it is, do you not?—for if not, I cannot tell you what it is. We get into the region of metaphysics when we begin to talk about love and there we lose ourselves. And I have known people try to describe what love to Christ is, and very soon, they have gone down in that sea. They could not explain it, for it does not go to be explained.

Sometimes I meet with persons in trouble of this sort. One says, "I read that I ought to love Christ with an unselfish love. Does not Francis Xavier say,—

*"Not with the hope of gaining aught,
Not seeking a reward,'—*

and so on—teaching us that we ought to love Christ simply for His own sake?” Yes, I know that is his teaching, and that many holy men have thought they kept to that, and I daresay they have. But I also know that love may be perfectly genuine and yet be as far as possible from being unselfish.

For instance, do you doubt the reality of the love of that little babe to its mother? No. If there is love anywhere, it is in that tiny child towards its parent. But is that love unselfish? Certainly not. Is not the love of dear kind children to their father and mother true love, and very sweet love, too? Of course it is, and we delight in it—but is it unselfish? No, they love us because, for years, they have received kindnesses at our hands and they expect we shall treat them in the same fashion in the future.

And I think that you and I will never be able to talk about being unselfish in our love to God when the very breath we breathe is His gift, His daily mercy supplies us with food, and we are clothed and cared for by His love. We are debtors—so deeply drowned in debt to Him that we must leave off talking about being unselfish.

Why, we are always receiving something or other from our God and so we shall be till we die. We are beggars at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple, receiving daily alms from Christ, and inasmuch as John, who was, perhaps, the noblest of all the saints, only got so far as to say, “We love him, because he first loved us,” I am quite satisfied if I can get as far as John did. And if you cannot say anymore than that, you may be well content if you can join with John and the rest of the disciples of Christ in saying, “We love him, because he first loved us.” Do not trouble yourself about the metaphysical distinctions which some try to draw. If you love Christ, it is a simple thing, though you may not be able to explain it to others, or even to yourself.

Further, *you must not always expect to display that love to the same extent.* We are sometimes very foolish about that matter. You have an intense affection for your child, but you are busy all day long in your shop or your warehouse, and perhaps, throughout the whole day, not one thought of your boy has crossed your mind. Does anybody say that you do not love him? No. Your love was just as true as ever, but there were other things that claimed your attention.

Possibly you are away on a long journey, and one evening, as you are sitting down to rest, there comes a letter from your child, and as you read it, you say, “Bless his little heart, I wish I had him on my knee at this moment.” Something has come, you see, to awaken the love that was there all the while, for true love in our heart is often like the partridge or the pheasant in the shooting time. When somebody comes near, up they go. Yes, but they were there before—they would not have flown up if they had not been under cover. So, often, do the graces of Christians hide themselves away for a time till the occasion for their display arises. And then, up they start, but they would not have started up if they had not been there.

We were singing, a few minutes ago—

“If ever I loved Thee, my Jesus, ’tis now.”

Well, if you meant it then, you will still love Him tomorrow, when your hands are busily occupied at your toilsome task, or your brain is counting up the long rows of figures which make your eyes ache, or you have to wait upon so many customers that you get utterly weary. You may not be able to be always thinking about divine subjects, but if your heart is right, your love to your Lord is there all the while.

We cannot always tell, during the day, where the rooks live, for they fly all over the fields. But at night, we see which way they go to where their nests are built in the old rookery. So, your thoughts may fly hither and thither during the day, but when you get home, they come back to your blessed Lord and Master. That is where the home of your heart is, for when it gets the opportunity—when it is let go, as the apostles were—it goes to its own company. So may it always be with you, beloved!

But *our love to Christ*, though it is, in itself, a simplicity, *is based upon a great mystery.* The mystery is that He should ever have loved us at all. Can anybody tell us how it was that Christ ever began to love

us? I sometimes fancy that I could explain why Jesus Christ loved some of you, but I cannot make out why He ever loved me—that is a matter which I must leave until I see Him.

But I suppose it was because He would do it—because His own sovereign will so determined. Certainly, I cannot conceive of any other cause. And if any of you ever think that you were saved because you were better than other people, or that you owe the first advances towards being saved to your own free will—well, I am glad if there are any such good people about, but I know that it was not so with me.

And I think that the most of God's people will say, "No, no, no, no. If there is any difference between us and others, it is the grace of God that has made it, so let Him have all the glory of it." There is a difference between some of us and others whom we know—and whoever made it ought to have the crown for it. If you made it yourself, brother, you can claim the crown. But I know that you will not do that if you are really a lover of the Lord, but that you will cry with us, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Your name give glory, for Your mercy, and for Your truth's sake."

So I conclude that we are all agreed that the difference between us and our former selves, and our old companions, is one which sovereign grace has made—and that this is a great mystery—although our love in return for it is a simplicity.

IV. I can only give you just a few sentences upon our last point, which is this—OUR LOVE IS A FORCE SUSTAINED BY A HIGHER FORCE.

Our love is a force. If you truly love God, you feel it to be so. *It is a force that comforts and emboldens us.* Out of love to God, we feel that we can even dare the devil to do his worst against us. When love fills us to the full, it makes us courageous.

Love to God also constrains us. With the apostle Paul, we cry, "For the love of Christ constraineth us." Because of this love, we often do things which we would never have chosen to do of ourselves—and we leave undone the things we should once have liked to do. "Love is strong as death." And when once it gets full possession of a man, you know how completely it will carry him away—and love to God is indeed a mighty force of which, perhaps, we have not any of us proved the full power as yet.

But *it is a force which is kept up by a higher force*—namely, the love of God to us. What a force that is! Who can ever estimate its power? The love of God to men was so strong that when death and hell strove against it, they were driven away like chaff before the wind. All our sins stood like a mighty mountain, barring our way to God, but His love leveled every hill and made a plain path by which we might approach His mercy seat.

The love of God to His people is Omnipotent—there is no force in nature that can for a single moment be compared with it. It is irresistible, for the love of God conquered God Himself and brought Him down to earth in human form,—

*"First, in our mortal flesh, to serve;
Then, in that flesh, to die."*

"Found guilty of excess of love," our Savior was put to death that He might redeem us. He could lose His life for us, but He could not lose His love to us. O mighty force!

Then, do you not see, brethren, if there is such a force as this to draw upon, that the love of God, when it is shed abroad in our hearts, can give our love a greater force than it has ever had? With that greater force, there can be put into our lives an energy which we have never known. It is possible for us to rise to something far higher than our past poor little selves—we can do something more than we have ever dreamed of doing—and God can use us to perform nobler deeds of self-denial, to rise to greater heights of daring, and to stoop to deeper depths of humiliation than we have ever yet ventured on.

Strong Son of God—immortal love, nor pain, nor grief, nor bloody sweat, nor death itself, could stay You, and by Your sacred passion, we implore You to let Your love drop into our souls till we too shall become strong, like Yourself, according to our measure, and shall be able to contend for You, to suffer

for You, to live for You, and to die for You, all the while giving this as the explanation of it all—"We love him, because he first loved us"!

God bless you, beloved, for Christ's sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

1 JOHN 4

Verse 1. *Beloved, believe not every spirit,*

A simpleton believes every word that he hears, but "the wise man's eyes are in his head," so he examines what he sees and hears, and does not blindly accept whatever may be told to him. So John says, "Believe not every spirit,"

1-3. *But try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God:*

If there is any question raised about the deity and the humanity of Christ, do not listen any longer. When you taste the first morsel of meat from a joint, and you find that it is tainted, there is no necessity for you to eat all the rest to see if it is good. And if any man questions the true divinity and the real humanity of Christ, have nothing to do with him, and give no heed to what he says, for he "is not of God."

3-4. *And this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world. Ye are of God, little children,*

You who are trusting in Jesus and are born again of His Spirit, though you may have only a small influence with others and are but as little children in your own esteem, yet "ye are of God."

4. *And have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.*

There are two spirits—the Holy Spirit dwells in believers and the evil spirit dwells in the ungodly. But the Holy Spirit is stronger than the evil spirit and will certainly overcome him.

5. *They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them.*

When people say to you, "Everybody says so-and-so," that is not the reason why you should believe it. "All the men of advanced thought—all the scholars of the age, speak thus." Yes, just so—"They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them."

6. *We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us.*

The apostles spake as men sent from God, for the Spirit of God dwelt in them, and they alone know the truth who keep to that which has been revealed to us through His holy apostles and prophets.

6-7. *Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error. Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.*

From the abundance of love which was in John's heart, we might almost be startled at the very strong things that he writes against those who are in error, did we not remember that it is only a false charity which winks at error. He is the most loving man who has honesty enough to tell the truth and to speak out boldly against falsehood.

It is very easy to pass through this world believing and saying that everybody is right. That is the way to make a soft path for your own feet and to show that you only have love to yourself. But sometimes to speak as John the Baptist spoke, or as Martin Luther spoke, is the way to prove that you have true love to others.

8-10. *He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*

By nature we had no love to God—we were His enemies. We loved sin and we had ruined ourselves by it. But God took out of His own bosom the only Son He had, that He might make reconciliation for us and put away our sin. “Herein is love,” says the apostle, as though you could find it nowhere else as it is here. Here is the height and depth of love immeasurable. Here is love summed up, here is love’s climax. “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”

11. *Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.*

If such was His great kindness toward us that He denied Himself His own Son for our sake, ought we not to be kindly affectionate one toward another?

12. *No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.*

“God dwelleth in us” though we do not see Him. The nearest approach we can have to God is by this golden way of love.

13-14. *Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.*

John is speaking for himself and the rest of the apostles, for they were eye-witnesses who had seen Christ and therefore could testify to Him.

15-16. *Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.*

Is there anyone here who is full of anger, enmity, malice, and envy? If so, let him know that God dwells not in the heart that harbors such abominations. Until these base passions are expelled, and we feel love to all mankind for Christ’s sake, God is not in us, for, “He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.”

The old method, according to Jewish tradition, was, “You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” But Christ’s new rule is, “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven.” This is the point in which our likeness to God will be seen, for He loved us when we were His enemies—and He expects His children to love their enemies. May He graciously teach us that sacred art!

17. *Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.*

If we can be to the world, in our poor feeble measure, what God is to it—fountains of love, dispensaries of goodness—then we need not be afraid of the verdict even of the great day of judgment.

18. *There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear:*

If a man is conscious that he intends no harm to anyone, that he wishes good to all mankind, that he loves his God, and loves his fellow men for God’s sake, what has he to fear? He becomes the bravest of the brave, and often finds himself safe and unharmed in places where others dare not go.

18-20. *Because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. We love him, because he first loved us. If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar:*

John! John! John! This is a very strong expression. Did we not always understand that John was full of affection? Yes, but he was not one of those oily, sugary sort of people who cannot speak the truth. There is no real love in that kind of man—he has only the mere pretense of love.

John speaks sharply because he loves ardently. True love hates that which is unlovely. It is inevitable that a man who is full of love should feel intense indignation against that which is contrary to love. Hence the apostle says, “If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar.”

20-21. *For he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.*

And the word “brother” is to be understood in the widest possible sense. We are all brothers, springing from the same common parent, and therefore we ought to be philanthropists, lovers of man, loving even the guilty and the worthless, having an earnest desire to do good even to those who do us evil.

If we have not yet reached that spirit, we had need begin our true Christian life at the foot of the cross, by trusting and loving Him who died there out of love for sinners—for only there can we learn, in the person of Christ Jesus our Lord—this divine philosophy of love to God and men.

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